

What influenced the development of West Africa in the late 18th Century?





# What were the social, economic and political conditions of West African societies prior to the slave trade?

## Lesson 1



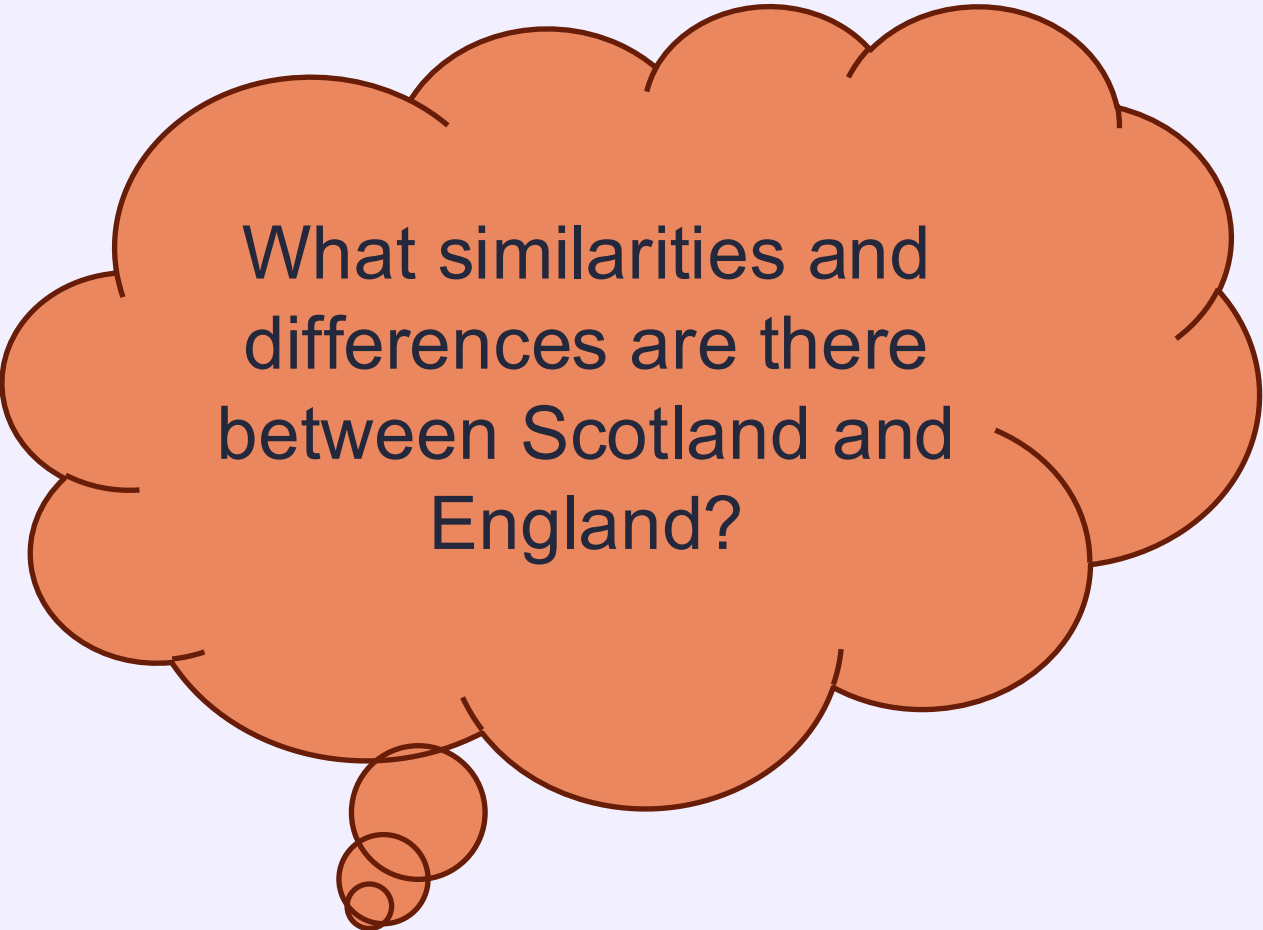


## Starter Task

**Think:** Write down your answer to the following questions.

**Pair:** Discuss your answers with a partner.

**Share:** Discuss the different answers as a class.

A large, orange, cloud-like thought bubble with a dark brown outline, containing text. It has three smaller circles at the bottom, suggesting a tail or connection to the text above.

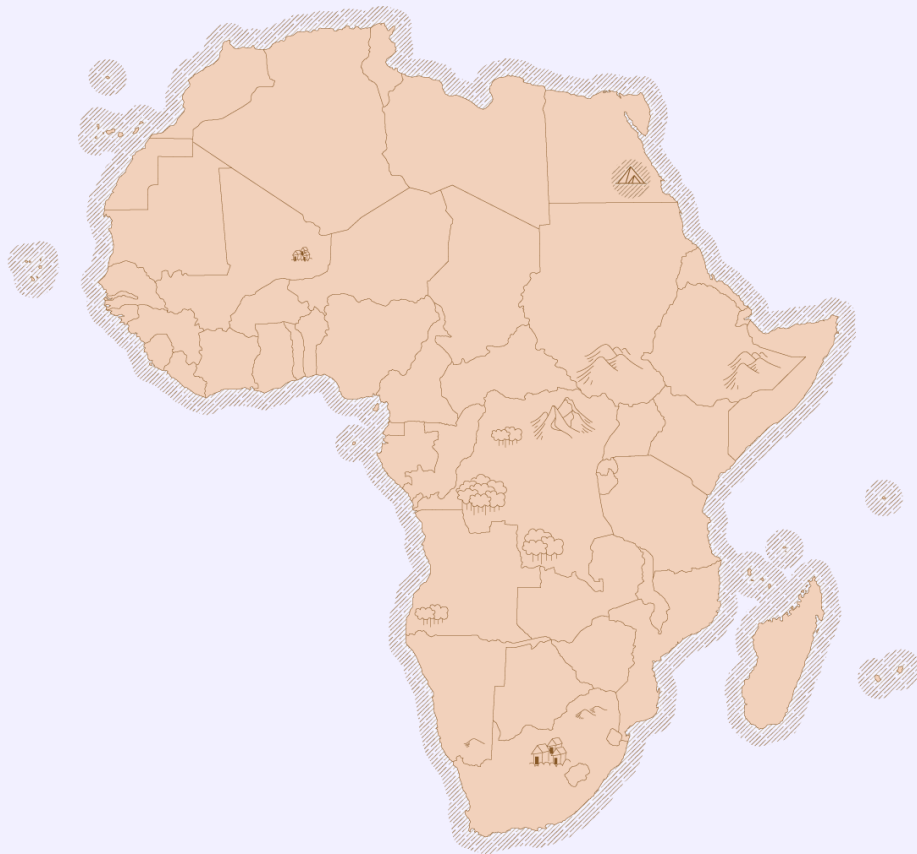
What similarities and differences are there between Scotland and England?



# Similarities and differences?



# The African Continent



Africa today is a continent made up of 54 different countries. Africa has:

- Between 1,000 and 2,000 different languages.
- 3 main religions: Christianity, Islam, and mixes of local traditional religions.
- 6 different time zones.

It is important to be aware of these nuances when discussing West Africa generally.

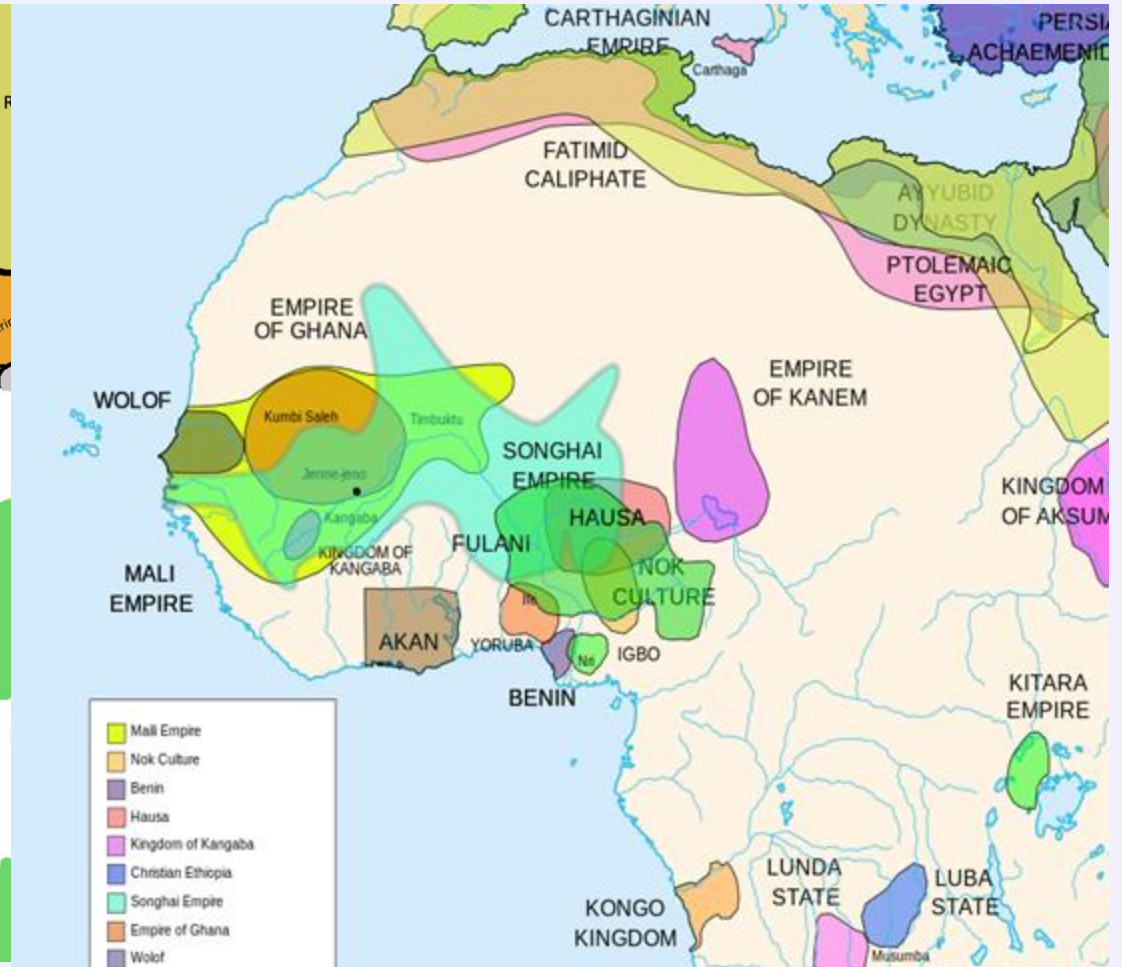
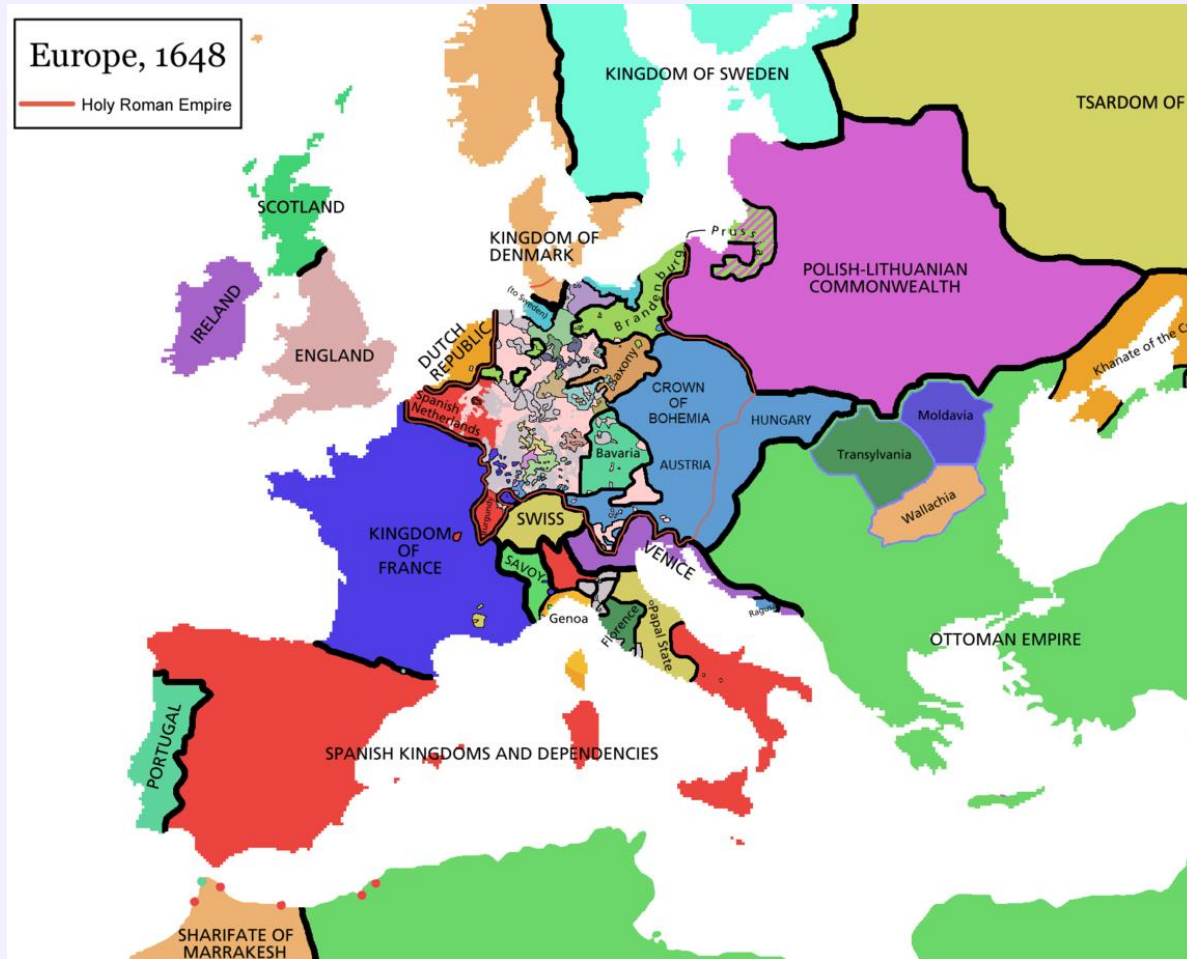
# West Africa before the slave trade

To understand the impact the Atlantic slave trade had on West Africa, we must have context on what West African societies were like **before** the trade. We will look at 3 areas:

- Politics
- Economy
- Society and people



# What are the differences between these maps?



## Task

The previous slide showed how fluid borders can be.

The following video shows how the border of Scotland changed over time - watch and consider **why you think this is the case?**

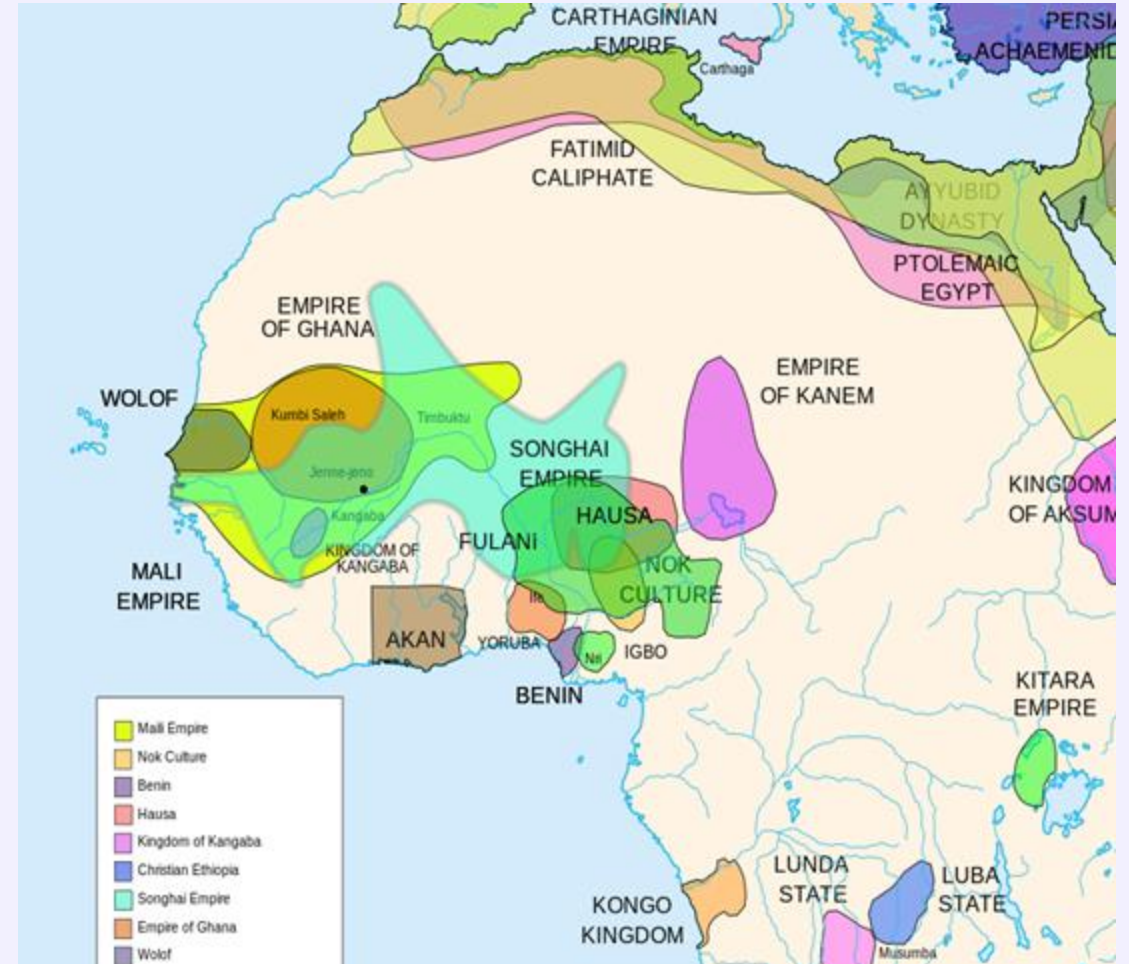




# Medieval West Africa

The map shows different African empires, kingdoms, and states in the 13<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> centuries.

These were constantly changing as their spheres of influence changed over time.



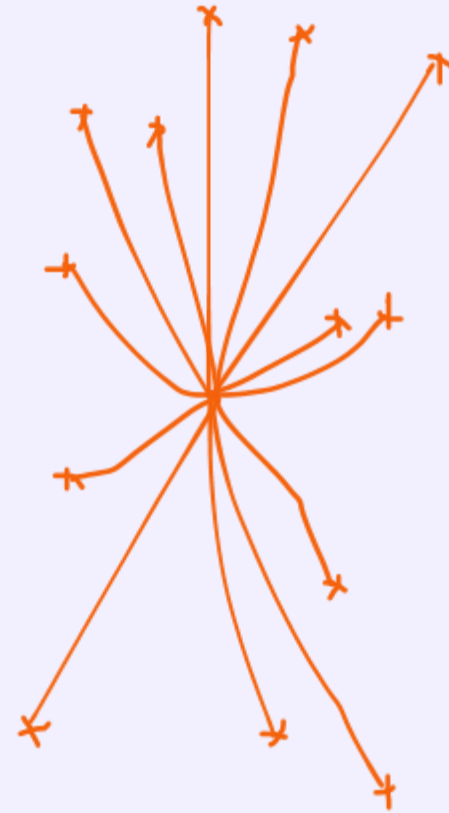
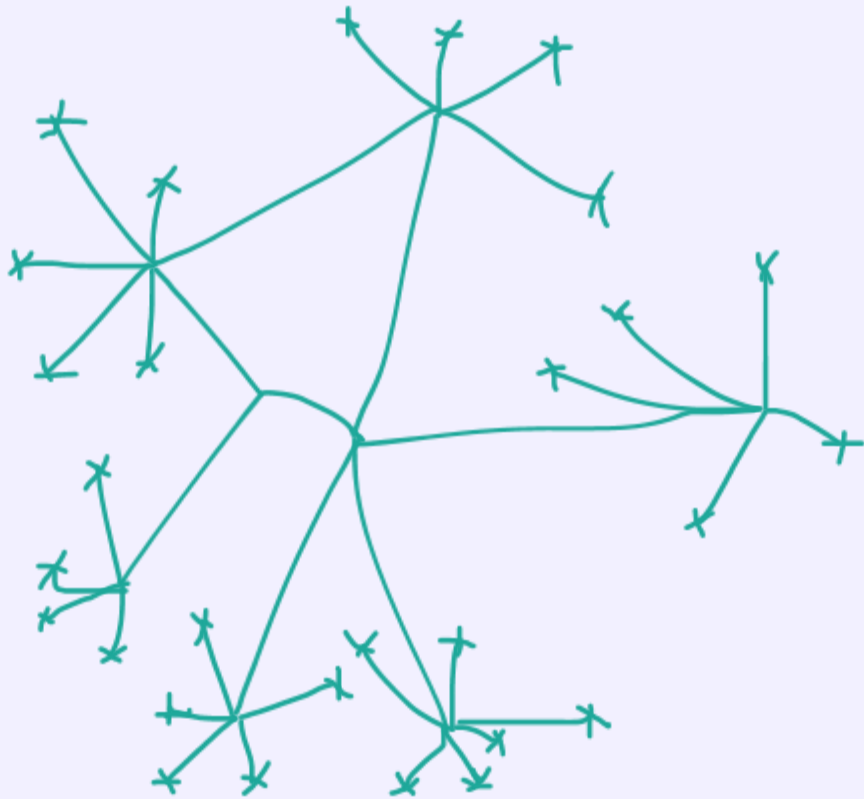
# Historian: Professor Toby Green

*West African Societies Before European Contact*

- <https://massolit.io/options/a5-the-transatlantic-slave-trade?auth=0&lesson=2207&option=16627&type=lesson>



# Decentralised vs Centralised



When we speak about different African societies and states, some are described as centralised and others as decentralised.

# Centralised States

## Positives

- **Quick decisions:** It's easier to make decisions because only a few people are in charge.
- **Same rules everywhere:** Everyone follows the same laws, so things are fair across the country.
- **Strong sense of belonging:** People feel more connected and united as one nation.

## Negatives

- **Power can be misused:** If one group has all the power, they might make unfair choices.
- **Local voices ignored:** People in different areas might feel like their needs aren't being heard.
- **Hard to manage big countries:** It's tough to run a big country from one place because different areas have different needs



# Decentralised States

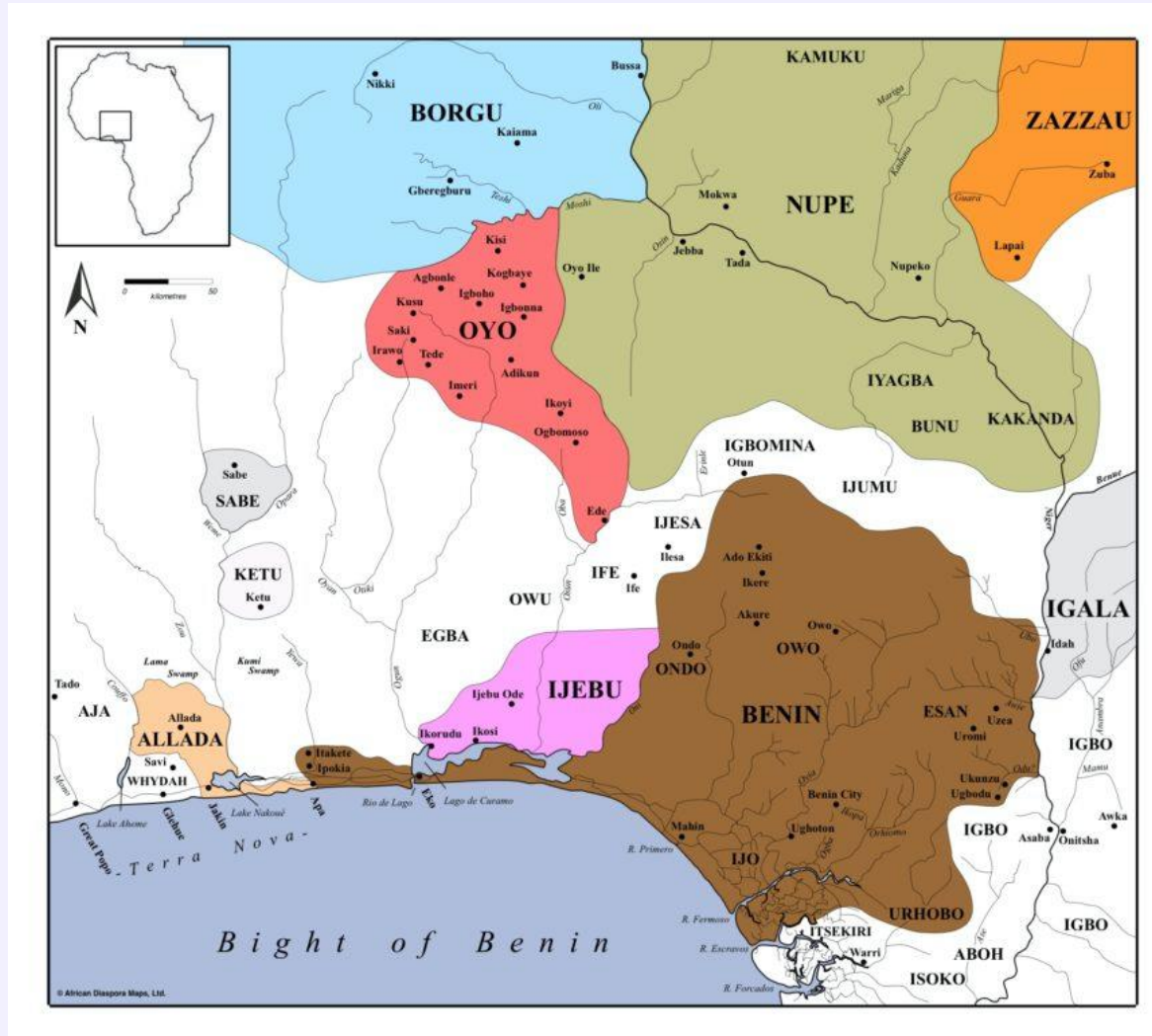
## Positives

- **Local decisions:** Different areas can make their own decisions based on what they need.
- **Power is shared:** Power is spread out, so no single group can control everything.
- **Flexible solutions:** Different regions can create rules that work best for them, even if they're different from other areas.

## Negatives

- **Slower decision-making:** It can take longer to agree on things because many groups are involved.
- **Inconsistent rules:** Different areas might have different laws, which can be confusing.
- **Weaker national unity:** People might feel more connected to their region than to the whole country, making the nation less united.

# The Kingdom of Benin: a centralised state



States of the Bight of Benin Interior c. 1580, courtesy of Henry B. Lovejoy, African Diaspora Maps Ltd., (CC BY 4.0)

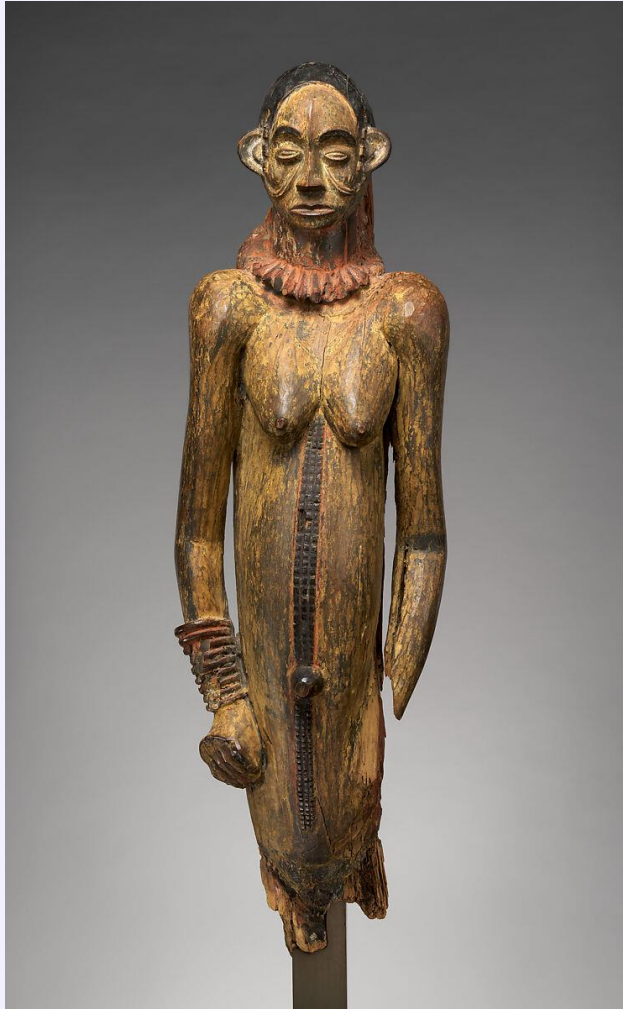


# The Kingdom of Benin: a centralised state

- Large Kingdom since 13th century.
- Expanded through military conquest.
- King (Oba) ruled over all areas.
- Known for created artistic works in bronze.
- Traded pepper, cloth, and ivory with Portuguese for brass and copper.



John Ogilvy, *De Stadt Benin*, 1670.  
New York Public Library



Igbo Figure from an Obu,  
The Met Museum

# Igbo communities

- Many small communities spread out and in charge of themselves.
- Biggest was Kingdom of Nri - did not practice slavery.
- Masters of iron technology - used to make ritual items, not weapons.
- Peace central to Nri way of life.

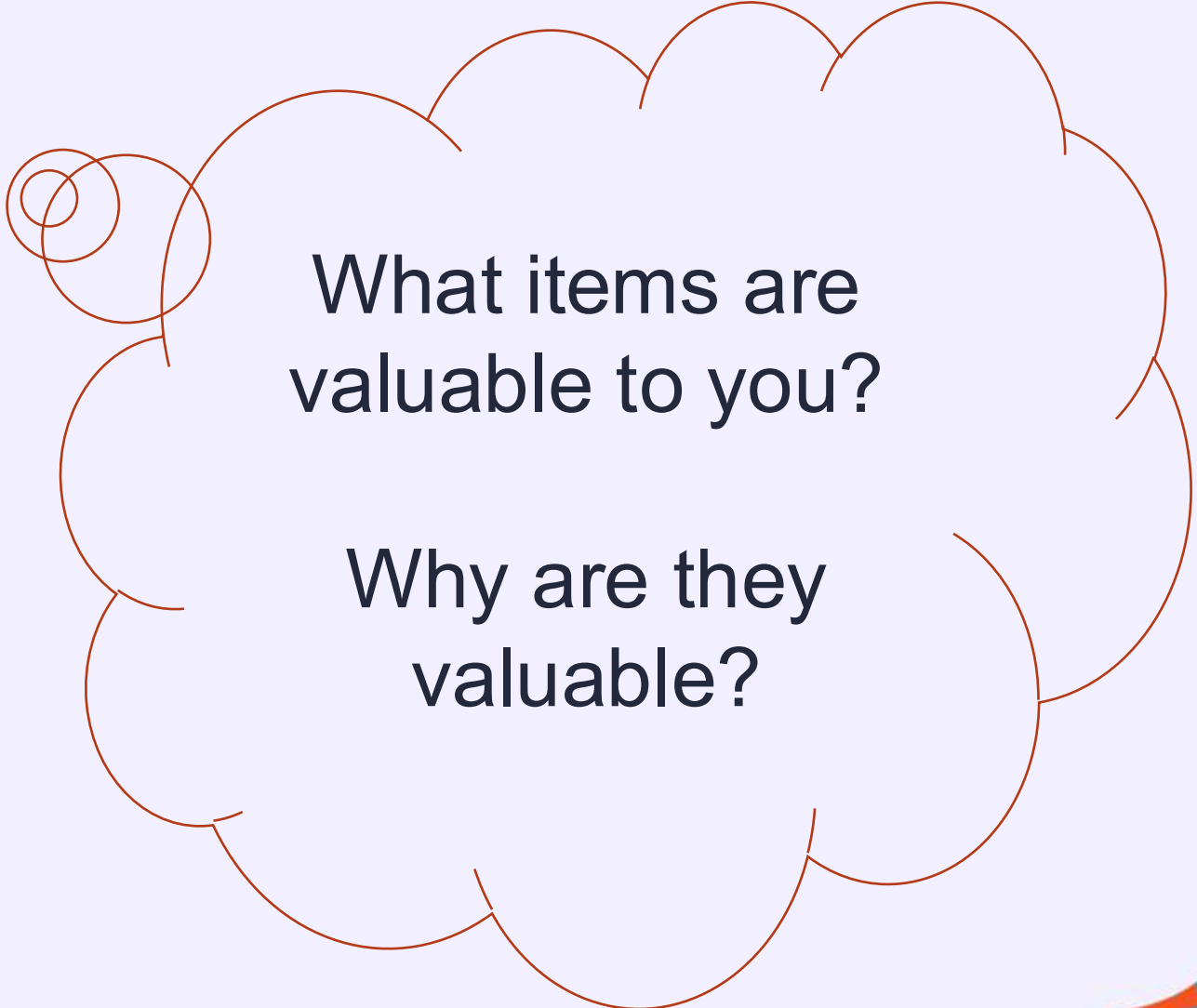


# Task: Think, Pair, Share

**Think:** Write down your answer to the following questions.

**Pair:** Discuss your answers with a partner.

**Share:** Discuss the different answers as a class.



What items are valuable to you?

Why are they valuable?

# Economy of West Africa



West African cowry money, 1796  
The British Museum.

Prior to European trade, African societies were economically self-sufficient.

The coast had a lively trade in resin, orchil, gold, spices, cattle, and people.

Cowrie shells were used as currency and decoration on precious objects.

# Economy of West Africa - Industry

Many West African societies produced and traded the following items:

- Bronze and Iron
- Cotton and textiles
- Gold
- Cattle hides.

**Write down the different uses of each of these items.**



# Items Produced

Many of these items reflected important figures and beliefs at the time.

These items were highly valuable and reflect incredible craftsmanship and smelting techniques.



**Benin Bronze**



**Terracotta statues**

# Gender roles

## Men

Prepared land for agriculture.

Harvested crops and vegetables.

Hunted for animals and raised livestock.

Served as soldiers in conflict.

If enslaved, more likely to be sold into the transatlantic slave trade.



Carved ivory mask-shaped pendant of the lyoba, The British Museum

## Women

Planted and weeded crops and vegetables.

Igbo women organised women's councils to shame males for crimes/misdemeanours.

In the Kingdom of Benin, the lyoba (mother of the king) wielded considerable power.

If enslaved, more likely to remain enslaved in Africa.

# Plenary: Summarising sentences.

In 3 sentences, summarise your learning from today's lesson. Use the following sentence stems:

1. West Africa's politics was complex because...
2. West African societies produced items such as...
3. Men and women had different roles in West African societies, such as...



